

A Summons To Be Heard: Towards a More Just Baptist Identity

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Abstract:

This brief article¹ traces some of the story of English Baptists with regards to gender and race in the last forty years and how the summons to be heard by women and people of colour has brought change to the Baptist Union of Great Britain and to Baptist life more widely.

Key Words:

Women in ministry; racial justice; Baptist Union of Great Britain

Introduction

Through the 1980s and 1990s, Baptists in England were changing. This was in part because England as a society was changing,² but it was also about the impact of big movements — charismatic, evangelical, ecumenical — that were transforming the sense of being Christian and being church.³ At another level, it was also about those with less power asking to be heard.⁴ In 1987, the first woman minister, Margaret

¹ I am grateful to Ashley Lovett and Julian Gotobed for their comments in the preparation of this article.

² See *20th Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change*, ed. by Francesca Carneval and Julie-Marie Strange (London: Taylor & Francis, 2014).

³ On the charismatic movement from a Baptist perspective see Douglas McBain, *Fire Over the Waters* (London: DLT, 1997); on evangelicalism, see Rob Warner, *Reinventing English Evangelicalism* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), and on ecumenism see Keith Jones, 'Twentieth Century Baptists: An Ecumenical Highpoint?', *Baptist Quarterly*, 52, no. 1 (January 2021), 21–33.

⁴ I acknowledge here my own relative power, as a white male, which gives me a position of privilege not afforded to women or people of colour, about whom I am writing in this paper.

Jarman,⁵ was appointed president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB)⁶ and in 1997, the first non-white minister, Fred George, was appointed president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.⁷ Both of these appointments were influential in helping women and people of colour begin to feel a part of a more equal and just Baptist Union, or perhaps, begin to hope that there might be a more equal and just Baptist Union emerging. They were important because they gave Baptists a platform to talk more widely about gender and race. In the 1980s and 1990s, both women and people of colour were still a very small minority in the structures of the Baptist Union. While the story of women among Baptists has been given some attention,⁸ the story of Black and Asian Baptists remains almost entirely untold.⁹

The Summons of Gender

⁵ For an account of Jarman's life see the obituary in the *Baptist Times* written by Keith Jones, April 2018 <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/519442/The_Revd_Sister.aspx> [accessed 17 March 2022].

⁶ Margaret Jarman was not the first woman president; Nell Alexander in 1978 had been the first woman appointed president, but she was not a minister.

⁷ All further references to the Baptist Union are a shorthand for the Baptist Union of Great Britain, which covers mainly England and South Wales.

⁸ See for example, John Briggs, 'She-Preachers, Widows and Other Women: The Feminine Dimension in Baptist Life since 1600', *Baptist Quarterly*, 31, no. 7 (July 1986), 337–352; Ruth Gouldbourne, *Reinventing the Wheel: Women and Ministry in English Baptist Life* (Oxford: Whitley, 1997); Faith Bowers, 'Liberating Women for Ministry', *Baptist Quarterly*, 45, no. 8 (2014), 456–64. Other studies are referenced in this paper below. For more historical studies, see also the work of Karen Smith, Rachel Adcock, and Linda Wilson.

⁹ For one study see David Killingray, 'Black Baptists in Britain, 1640–1950', *Baptist Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2003), 69–89. See also Paul Walker's work on African-American Baptist ministers Peter Stanford, Moses Roper, and Nathaniel Paul in Britain in the early twentieth century: 'Birmingham's coloured Preacher', *Baptist Minister's Journal*, 271 (July 2000), 5–9; 'Moses Roper (1815–?): An African-American Baptist in Victorian England (1835–44)', *Baptist Quarterly*, 42, no. 4 (2007), 296–302; 'The Revd Nathaniel Paul (1793–1839): Another African-American Baptist Minister in Britain (1832–1835)', *Baptist Quarterly*, 43, no. 2 (2009), 97–111. I am unaware of any study about Black and Asian Baptists in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century, save the brief references in Ian Randall, *The English Baptists in the 20th Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2005) and Roger Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage*, 2nd edn (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2005), 230–34. For a wider ecumenical overview see John Maiden, "'Race", Black Majority Churches, and the Rise of Ecumenical Multiculturalism', *Twentieth Century British History*, 30, no. 4 (2019), 531–56.

When Margaret Jarman took up her post in 1987, she did not focus her presidency on being a woman,¹⁰ but the fact of being the second woman to hold the position, and the first accredited woman minister,¹¹ did generate conversation and reflection. An edition of the *Baptist Quarterly* was dedicated to ‘focus[ing] on women’s participation in the life of our Baptist churches’¹² and in the *Baptist Times*, there was a series of articles on the place of women in Baptist life, including a profile of a young Pat Took, who would herself go on to become the first woman appointed a general superintendent of the Baptist Union for the London area.¹³ The *Baptist Quarterly* articles were read by Jane Hassell,¹⁴ who called a meeting of women ministers in May 1987, which led to a delegation meeting with representatives of the Baptist Colleges.¹⁵ This organising of women ministers together began to give them a shared voice in the life of the Union. It began a new focus away from a lay-led women’s work centred on fellowship and mission, and towards the issue of women and accredited ministry and their representation in denominational structures.

The meeting with the colleges resulted in the colleges making a Statement of Intent in 1990.¹⁶ This affirmed women in ministry and in pastoral oversight; it recognised that the patterns for training had been and were inadequately supportive of women training for ministry; and it committed the colleges themselves to listening to women and their

¹⁰ The focus of her presidency was encouraging prayer, action, and retreat spirituality. The impact of her presidency was long lasting in the founding of the Baptist Union Retreat Group. See for Jarman’s reflections, Margaret Jarman, ‘BURG — The Journey’, Occasional Paper No. 10: <<https://burg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/occ-paper-10-the-journey.pdf>> [accessed 17 March 2022].

¹¹ Jarman had also first been a deaconess before her name was moved to the Ministerial Accredited List.

¹² ‘Editorial’, *Baptist Quarterly*, 31, no. 7 (July 1986), 301, with articles by Edward Lehman, Shirely Dex, Margaret Jarman, Carol McCarthy and John Briggs. Another article by Paul Fiddes appeared in the following edition 31, no. 8 (October 1986).

¹³ It was a five-week series running in October and November 1987.

¹⁴ Hassell had been minister of Victoria Park Baptist Church, Bow in London, from 1985.

¹⁵ The colleges were Bristol, Northern, Regent’s Park, South Wales, Spurgeon’s and St Andrew’s Hall (training centre for BMS). Ruth Gouldbourne charts the story behind this and other moves to improve the settlement process in ‘Identity and Pain: Women’s Consultations, 1987–1992’, *Baptist Ministers’ Journal*, 243 (July 1993), 8–10.

¹⁶ Gouldbourne, ‘Identity and Pain’, p. 8.

experiences, encouraging women to offer themselves for service as Baptist ministers, and to providing a supportive environment for theological and ministerial formation. In addition, the colleges promised to give more attention to feminist theology, to appointing more women as tutors, and to ‘being critical of ourselves and open to correction’.¹⁷ The outcome would slowly begin to challenge and remove some of the difficulties for women becoming Baptist ministers, although the numbers being trained remained low for another twenty years. A major difficulty women faced was, of course, related to a basic resistance to their ministry. In 1988, Baptist minister David Pawson published *Leadership Is Male*¹⁸ and this statement reflected the sentiment of a good number of ministers and churches in the Union.¹⁹

Following the colleges, the Baptist Union in 1992 also produced a statement of intent covering the next ten years, agreed to by the Council, that included the following declaration: ‘We affirm the equality of men and women in the sight of God and recognise the ministry of women as a gift of God on an equal basis. We hope to challenge Baptist Christians to examine in a radical way their attitude to the full partnership of women and men at all levels of leadership.’²⁰ One issue was representation on the Council. Two attempts to pass resolutions in 1992 and 1996 failed to get a majority that would have led to an increase in women representatives. A third attempt in 2002 was more successful.²¹ While this brought change to the Council, the larger question of the low numbers of women ministers continued to give concern. In 2007, Mainstream, an evangelical Baptist grouping, issued the Blackley Declaration, which spoke of a ‘cultural resistance’ to women ministers.²² Richard Nicholls, the Baptist Union general

¹⁷ See Nigel Wright, ‘Charting a Course for Liberation’, *Baptist Times*, 19 July 1990, p. 6.

¹⁸ J. David Pawson, *Leadership is Male* (Nashville: Nelson, 1988).

¹⁹ Ian Randall reports that Douglas Sparkes feared the ‘issue’ could split the Union (Randall, *English Baptists*, p. 452).

²⁰ Baptist Union of Great Britain, *A Ten Year Plan Towards 2000* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1992), p. 10.

²¹ See Andy Goodliff, ‘Women and the Institution’, *Journal of Baptist Theology in Context*, 1 (2020), 21–36.

²² Mainstream North Leadership Team, ‘The Blackley Declaration – January 2007’, *Freshstreams* <<https://freshstreams.net/wp-content/uploads/Blackley-declaration.pdf>> [accessed 17 March 2022]. In 2011 Mainstream was renamed Fresh Streams.

manager, in a meeting with the regional minister team leaders spoke of an ‘institutional sexism’ within the Baptist Union.²³ From this a fresh attempt was made towards institutional change. The March 2010 Council gave special focus to women in leadership.²⁴ Out of this meeting came an acknowledgement of the historic and ongoing hurt and pain woman experienced. The resolution that resulted included identifying ‘obstacles that prevent the acceptance of women for training’ and committed to ‘discern[ing] ways of addressing barriers to the full participation of women in all forms of leadership within BUGB’.²⁵ On the final morning, reflecting on the discussion that had taken place, Graham Sparkes, head of Faith and Unity, BUGB, spoke strongly that the resolution must ‘send us into a new future’. He went on to say that

commitment to the full inclusion of women in leadership is our ‘norm’, and those who disagree and want to be part of the family [i.e. the Union] have to reckon with that [...] [Dissent] should not be a cover for prejudice and discrimination that inflicts pain and hurt on the women amongst us.²⁶

In a letter to the *Baptist Times* this was perceived by Derek Tidball as a threat to those Baptist churches that did not affirm women in ministry.²⁷ Sparkes replied that he preferred the language of ‘opportunity’ to that of threat.²⁸

Any momentum for more proactive action that might have emerged out of that Council meeting was interrupted by the Futures

²³ Representatives of the BUGB Women’s Justice Group, the Regional Associations, the Baptist Colleges, the BUGB staff, and Mainstream (North), ‘Women in Leadership in the BUGB’, unpublished briefing paper for the BUGB Faith and Unity Executive (IMC, Birmingham, UK, 31 July 2008), p. 2.

²⁴ It was inspired in part by the example of the Council that gave time to the apology over the issue of slavery, as discussed below.

²⁵ Baptist Union Council Minutes, March 2010, p. 10.

²⁶ Baptist Union Council Minutes, March 2010, p. 26.

²⁷ ‘Letters’, *Baptist Times*, 9 April 2010, p. 6.

²⁸ Sparkes’s response was published on the letters page of the *Baptist Times*, 16 April 2010, p. 6. The following month, I co-wrote a letter with Neil Brighton, Craig Gardiner, and Simon Woodman arguing that the resolution of the Council was not un-Baptist but the very opposite. It was entirely appropriate for the Council to ‘actively seek to promote, facilitate and encourage the ministry of women’ and ‘challenge those churches that disagreed’ (‘Letters’, *Baptist Times*, 14 May 2010, p. 7).

Process,²⁹ begun in 2011 to deal with the pressing financial situation in the Union, and it was nearly another decade before women and ministry was again given sustained attention. It can be argued that some progress had been made when, in 2014, all four governing roles in the Baptist Union (general secretary, president, moderator of council, moderator of the trustees) were held or about to be held by women. Paul Goodliff suggested this was an ‘historic moment’.³⁰ The moment has not been long-lasting, however. While Lynn Green has remained in post as the general secretary, since 2014 there have been no other women taking on the roles of moderator of council or of the trustees and only one other woman, Diane Tidball in 2016, has acted as president. Additionally, the number of women holding the office of regional minister has fallen. In 2018 the Union marked a hundred years of women in Baptist ministry.³¹ In 2019, it appointed Jane Day as Centenary Enabler, ‘to encourage and equip women in exercising their God-given gifting and leadership’,³² and as of 2021, a three-year research project, Project Violet, is beginning ‘to understand more fully the theological, missional, and structural obstacles women ministers face in the Baptist community’.³³

There are certainly more women in Baptist ministry now, and there are women in significant roles within the Union. As of the time of writing in 2021, the general secretary, the faith and society team leader,

²⁹ The Futures Process took place between 2011 and 2013 in response to a large deficit in the Union’s funds. It led to a second re-organisation of Baptist life, following the changes introduced in 2002.

³⁰ The women were Lynn Green, Jenni Entrican, Sheila Martin, and Jenny Royal. See Paul Goodliff, ‘Women’s Ministry: An Exploration at a Historic Moment’, *Baptist Quarterly*, 45 (October 2014), 485–99.

³¹ It produced a booklet, *A Short History of Baptist Women in Ministry* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2018); an edition of the *Baptists Together* magazine (Spring 2018); a book of prayers and readings called *Gathering Up the Crumbs*, by Catriona Gorton et al. (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2020); and a conference, *Celebrating, Surviving and Thriving – Women in Baptist Ministry* (IMC, Birmingham, 28–29 June 2018).

³² ‘Jane Day Appointed Centenary Enabler’, *Baptist Times*, 21 August 2019: https://baptisttimes.co.uk/Articles/554164/Jane_Day_appointed.aspx [accessed 17 March 2022].

³³ ‘Launch of Project Violet’, *Baptist Times*, 3 June 2021: https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/612263/Launch_of_Project.aspx.> [accessed 17 March 2022].

Named Project Violet after Violet Hedger, the first woman to train for ministry in a Baptist College.

the moderator of the ministerial recognition committee, and the president-elect for 2022 are all women.³⁴ There is, though, an ongoing sense that Baptists still work with an understanding of history and identity that is male. Back in 1997, Ruth Gouldbourne delivered the Whitley Lecture on the theme of women in ministry in Baptist life and argued that to take the ministry of women seriously required a ‘radical questioning of the way we structure ministry, training for it, and the expectations we put on it’.³⁵ Her remarks remain relevant, contending that if the ministry of women is to be celebrated and recognised as a gift, ‘then we need to listen to the voices from the margins, [and] accept the ministry offered from outside’,³⁶ by which she means the context in which women exist and minister. What Gouldbourne offers is the beginnings of ‘a different Baptist narrative of gender’.³⁷ Beth Allison-Glenny has begun to tease this out further, borrowing ideas of how gender is performative and embodied.³⁸

The Summons of Race

When did the Baptist Union of Great Britain begin to engage in issues of racial justice? Through the 1970s and 1980s, the Assembly and the Council gave occasional recognition to the problem of racism³⁹ and made statements towards greater diversity,⁴⁰ but it was not until the mid-

³⁴ Lynn Green, Diane Watts, Sian Murray Williams, and Hayley Young.

³⁵ Gouldbourne, *Reinventing the Wheel*, p. 43.

³⁶ Gouldbourne, *Reinventing the Wheel*, pp. 44–45.

³⁷ Beth Allison-Glenny, ‘Baptist Interpretations of Scripture on the Complementarity of Male and Female’, in *Gathering Disciples: Essays in Honor of Christopher J. Ellis*, ed. by Myra Blyth and Andy Goodliff (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), pp. 90–110 (p. 109). For more on Ruth Gouldbourne’s theology, see Beth Allison-Glenny and Andy Goodliff, ‘Appreciating Ruth’, *Journal for Baptist Theology in Context*, 4 (2021), 73–82.

³⁸ See Beth Allison-Glenny, ‘Performing Baptism, Embodying Christ’, in *Reconciling Rites: Essays in Honour of Myra N. Blyth*, ed. by Andy Goodliff, Anthony Clarke and Beth Allison-Glenny (Oxford: Regent’s Park College, 2020), pp. 23–47.

³⁹ The British Council of Churches through its Community and Race Relations Unit (CRRU) produced a range of reports, in particular, *The New Black Presence in Britain* (London: British Council of Churches, 1976) and *Rainbow Gospel* (London: British Council of Churches, 1988). I have not been able to find (as yet) who was representing the Baptist Union in the Unit.

⁴⁰ Fred George viewed this as Baptists taking ‘the easy and, sometimes, futile option of pious resolutions about racism and its evil effects, without the willingness to translate words into

1990s and the creation of a Racial Justice Forum that greater action began to take place.⁴¹ In the background was also the important, costly, and persistent local advocacy work carried out by groups in Birmingham, Leeds, Nottingham, Bristol, and London.⁴² It was during the period of the 1990s that persons of colour began to take a lead themselves.⁴³ There had been no mention of racial justice in the Baptist Union's 'A Ten Year Plan Towards 2000', although in the accompanying 'National Mission Strategy' there was acknowledgement that a plan for the 'furthering of racial justice in our denomination needs to be devised'.⁴⁴ The Churches' Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ) was a long-standing body active in the area of challenging racism and supporting churches in this, and in the period of the 1990s the deputy moderator of the CCRJ was a Baptist, Pat White, who was also the Chair of the Union's own Racial Justice Forum.⁴⁵ In 1995, the CCRJ called for an ecumenical Racial Justice Sunday to be introduced as a response to the racially motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence in London and this was promoted by the Union. Racial Justice was made a 'priority' by the Council in March 1996.⁴⁶ The Social Action Committee organised a focus on racial justice for 1996–97, and this was given an added profile

positive action by risking change and releasing resources to challenge and combat racism in church and society'. ('Race and Racism', *Mainstream Magazine*, January 1996, p. 7)

⁴¹ This was in part mirroring the CCBI Churches' Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ). The CCRJ and its predecessor, the CRRU, had a long history of challenging racism and resourcing the churches. Its most long-lasting initiative has been a call to churches to mark an annual Racial Justice Sunday, first held in 1995. See *Churches Together in Britain and Ireland* <<https://ctbi.org.uk/category/witnessing-together/racial-justice/racial-justice-sunday/>> [accessed 17 March 2022]. In 2003, it produced *Redeeming the Time: All God's People Must Challenge Racism* (London: CTBI, 2003).

⁴² The *Baptist Times* featured stories of these different groups in their edition of 4 September 1997, pp. 8–9, 10. For an earlier report on the Birmingham project, Progress Within, set up in 1991 see *Baptist Times*, 16 July 1992, p. 6.

⁴³ Early voices on Council were Desmond Gordon (minister at Finchley Baptist Church, London, 1979–2010) and Tony O'Connor (a deacon at Acocks Green Baptist Church, Birmingham). Gordon was the founder of the Black Baptist Ministers' Forum, which later was renamed the Black and Asian Ministers' Forum.

⁴⁴ *A Ten Year Plan Towards 2000 incorporating the National Mission Strategy* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1993), p. 20.

⁴⁵ Pat White was a member of Brixton Baptist Church, London. For more see *Baptist Times*, 15 July 1993, p. 6, and 7 September 1995, p. 15.

⁴⁶ 'Council Agrees to make Pursuit of Racial Justice a Priority', *Baptist Times*, 28 March 1996, p. 3.

when Fred George was appointed president of the Baptist Union for that year. George was from Sri Lanka, had trained at Spurgeon's, been minister of East Barnet Baptist Church in London since 1970, and was a member of the Racial Justice Forum.⁴⁷ The theme of George's presidency was 'Take the Risk' and emphasised 'combatting racial injustice'. He highlighted the lack of resources in the Baptist Union for tackling racial injustice and lamented the lack of a national role on the issue.⁴⁸ As a person of colour, from the stage of a Baptist assembly, he named perhaps for the first time 'the hurt, pain, anger and brokenness of those who have for generations been marginalised and abused on grounds of race and colour'.⁴⁹ He argued that 'we have to face the painful truth that many of our Black and Asian sisters and brothers are excluded and marginalised by the institutionalised racism present in many of our churches'. He called the Assembly to 'a repentance that leads to active reconciliation'. In 1998, the London Baptist Association appointed Rosemarie Davidson as the first racial justice co-ordinator, reflecting the committed work by a few to see that the London Association ensured racial justice was part of its life, and this appointment paved the way for a similar national role.⁵⁰

In January 1999, the issue of racial justice was taken up by the Baptist World Alliance at an International Summit in Atlanta, Georgia. A final statement, known as the Atlanta Covenant, called on Baptists worldwide to make the decade 2000–2010 a decade to promote racial justice.⁵¹ In attendance at the summit representing the BUGB were Chris Andre-Watson,⁵² David Ellis,⁵³ Fred George, Rosemarie

⁴⁷ See profile in *Baptist Times*, 1 May 1997, pp. 10–12.

⁴⁸ Fred George, 'Take the Risk', *Baptist Times*, 4 September 1997, p. 10.

⁴⁹ Fred George, "'Take the Risk", Presidential Address', *Baptist Times*, 1 May 1997, pp. 6, 15.

⁵⁰ Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed is currently National Minority Ethnic Vocations Officer for the Church of England.

⁵¹ Denton Lotz, ed., *Baptists Against Racism*, Proceedings of the International Summit on Baptists Against Racism and Ethnic Conflict (Falls Church, VA: BWA, 1999).

⁵² Andre-Watson was a Baptist minister in Croydon, Greater London, and member of the Racial Justice Forum.

⁵³ Ellis was a Baptist minister in Bristol and chair of the Keyboard Project, a Bristol racial justice group. His reflections on the summit can be found in Anthony Reddie, Wale Hudson-Roberts, and Gale Richards, eds, *Journeying to Justice* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2017), pp. 38–44. Ellis is currently a regional minister in the Heart of England Association.

Davidson-Gotobed, Anne Wilkinson-Hayes,⁵⁴ and Pat White.⁵⁵ At the BUGB Baptist Assembly that same May, the Union adopted the Atlanta Covenant.⁵⁶ Out of this activity for change, in 2002, the Union appointed its first national Racial Justice Advisor, Wale Hudson-Roberts.⁵⁷ In beginning his role, he said that the Baptist Union does ‘not start very strongly on this issue’ and that his vision was that ‘there will be increasing multi-cultural participation and contribution’.⁵⁸ This made racial justice a more fixed and public part of Baptist life. Hudson-Roberts was part of the Union’s mission department, and here, arguably, was one of the problems: racial justice was seen as a mission issue,⁵⁹ rather than one concerning faith and unity. In 2007, racial justice would become part of the faith and unity brief. In 2003, the London Baptist Association appointed two persons of colour as regional ministers, David Shosanya and Sivakumar Rajagopalan, and in 2006 Kate Coleman would be the second person of colour to become president of the Baptist Union. Her presidential address, ‘Stay Focused’, reflecting on Acts 10, argued that Baptists needed to confront presumption, prejudice, and power.⁶⁰ In terms of presumption, she highlighted the need to challenge the notion that Christianity was ‘a white man’s religion’ and that there was no black and Asian presence in the Bible.⁶¹ Quoting Paul Marshall, she noted that ‘Christianity was in Africa before Europe, India before England, China before America’.⁶² In the same

⁵⁴ Wilkinson-Hayes had been social justice advisor for the Baptist Union, 1992–97.

⁵⁵ Moderator, Racial Justice Forum.

⁵⁶ The resolution was submitted by Brixton Baptist Church, London, and in partnership with the Black and Asian Ministers’ Forum and the Task Group on Racial Justice. The context of the resolution was not just the Atlanta Covenant but also the MacPherson Report, a judicial inquiry commissioned in 1997 into the police handling of the investigation into the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence in South London in 1993.

⁵⁷ A national racial justice advisor had first been suggested in 1989. Hudson-Roberts had trained at Spurgeon’s and been the minister at Stroud Green Baptist Church, London.

⁵⁸ Wale Hudson-Roberts, ‘I’m angry that ethnics are playing second fiddle’, *Baptist Times*, 3 October 2002, p. 7.

⁵⁹ The Racial Justice Forum and later the Racial Justice Task Group were all initiatives within the mission department; at its beginning, it was located within the work of the social affairs brief.

⁶⁰ Kate Coleman, ‘Stay Focused’, *Baptist Times*, 4 May 2006, pp. 12–13.

⁶¹ On this see also Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), especially pp. 96–117.

⁶² The quotation from Paul Marshall is taken from his work, *Their Blood Cries Out* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1997).

year Coleman was also invited to give the Whitley Lecture, which was entitled ‘Being Human: A Black British Christian Woman’s Perspective’ and was based on her doctorate undertaken at the University of Birmingham.⁶³ Also in 2006, the Baptist Union published (in collaboration with the United Reformed Church) ‘We Belong: Celebrating Cultural Diversity and Living Hospitality’, which was a six-session study on racial justice.⁶⁴ The number of people of colour on the Council had risen to ten from only four in 1997, and their presence on the stage at the Baptist Assembly was more visible.⁶⁵

In 2007, the United Kingdom marked the 200th anniversary of the end of the transatlantic slave trade. At the Baptist Assembly in May 2007, the BMS Director Alistair Brown and BU General Secretary Jonathan Edwards led prayers of lament. At the same Assembly, the President of the Jamaican Baptist Union Karl Henlin gave an address that called for an apology to be made and for compensation to be rendered.⁶⁶ In July, at the BWA annual gathering in Ghana, the absence of an apology from British Baptists was noticeable, and Tony Peck, the then general secretary of the European Baptist Federation, added his support for one to be made.⁶⁷ Subsequently, the BUGB trustees agreed that the November Baptist Union Council would include ‘a process for a conversation concerning an apology’.⁶⁸ Over the three days of the Council, presentations, small group discussion, and plenary sessions gave space to exploring a response to the request for an apology. On

⁶³ See also Kate Coleman, ‘Another Kind of Black’, *Black Theology*, 5, no. 3 (2007), 279–304; Kate Coleman, ‘Woman, Single, Christian’ in *Sisters with Power*, ed. by Joe Aldred (London: Continuum, 2000), pp. 10–23.

⁶⁴ It was designed for a predominantly ‘white audience who do not see the relevance of racial awareness and cross-cultural training’ (BUGB/URC, *We Belong: Celebrating Cultural Diversity and Living Hospitality* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2006), p. 4).

⁶⁵ Robert Beckford (2000), Bev Thomas (2002), Paul Boateng, Joel Edwards, Kate Coleman (2000), John Sentamu (2005), Karl Henlin, Les Isaac, Joe Kapolyo (2007), Neville Callum (2009), and Kwame Adzang (2010).

⁶⁶ A copy of Henlin’s address can be found in *Journeying to Justice*, ed. by Reddie et al., pp. 49–55.

⁶⁷ ‘I do not think that it is too late to make [an apology] to our Jamaican Baptists brothers and sisters [...] [F]or me the Dutch statement at the Cape Coast was a model to us which I hope we will follow.’ (Tony Peck, ‘Letter to the Editor’, *Baptist Times*, 19 July 2007, p. 8)

⁶⁸ Wale Hudson-Roberts, ‘The Apology: A Journey Towards Justice’, in *Journeying to Justice*, ed. by Reddie et al., pp. 70–82 (p. 72).

the final day, an apology was offered, in which the following words were used:

We offer our apology to God and to our brothers and sisters for all that has created and still perpetuates the hurt which originated from the horror of slavery.⁶⁹

It was called a *kaïros* and a ‘Pentecost’ moment.⁷⁰ This was not just about the past, but about the present as well. In addition to the apology, a resolution was passed that the Union would ‘continue to develop ways of promoting racial justice’. The theology that was offered around the apology was that of the African concept of *ubuntu*, which speaks of a corporate identity: “‘my’ humanity and the humanity of the whole community are profoundly interconnected.”⁷¹ Jonathan Edwards also spoke of being part of a ‘communion of saints, who brought their history with them’.⁷² The Council meeting and the apology had a profound effect on those present, but translating this to the wider Baptist constituency was not straightforward.⁷³ At the 2008 Baptist Assembly, although the apology was talked about, there was no attempt to see it given official support from the Assembly.⁷⁴ Following the apology, the Union initiated what was named the ‘Journey Process’ in

⁶⁹ The Apology in full can be read online: The Baptist Union of Great Britain, ‘Faith and Society Files: The Apology for Slavery’, November 2007, *Baptists Together* <<https://www.baptist.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=111235&view=browser>> [accessed 23 February 2022].

⁷⁰ Jenny Williams, ‘Slavery Apology Unites Council in “Act of God”’, *Baptist Times*, 22 November 2007, p. 1. See also this report on the Apology delivered in Jamaica, Paul Hobson, ‘Slavery Apology to be Delivered in Jamaica’, *Baptist Times*, 22 May 2008, p. 1.

⁷¹ Richard Kidd, ‘Memory and Communion’, in *Baptists and the Communion of Saints* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2014), p. 46. For more on *ubuntu* see Joe Kapolyo, *The Human Condition: Christian Perspectives Through African Eyes* (Leicester: IVP, 2005), pp. 34–40.

⁷² Baptist Union Council Minutes, 21 November 2007. For further reflection on a theology of the communion of saints, see Paul Fiddes, Brian Haymes, and Richard Kidd, *Baptists and the Communion of Saints* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014). For a wider discussion of church, sin, and the past, see Jeremy Bergen, *Ecclesial Repentance* (London: T & T Clark, 2011).

⁷³ See BUGB, *Lest We Forget* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2018).

⁷⁴ I make this point because there was perhaps a missed opportunity. It has been argued that the Union has two means of discerning and decision-making. One is the Union’s Council and the second is the Assembly. In a 1994 report, the Doctrine and Worship Committee argued that ‘the Assembly is a more comprehensive expression of the Union than the Council [...] [I]t seems to have more potential than the Council for creating trust across all the churches’ (*The Nature of the Assembly and the Council of Baptist Union of Great Britain* (Didcot: Baptist Union, 1994), p. 20).

2011, with the aim of making the apology concrete in Baptist life and structures. The result has been mixed. Resources have been created,⁷⁵ an annual lecture in memory of the Jamaican Baptist deacon and slave Sam Sharpe has been inaugurated,⁷⁶ three more people of colour have held the post of president of the Union,⁷⁷ and a closer relationship with the Jamaican Baptist Union has developed.⁷⁸ One other area of work to be mentioned as part of this journey comes at the intersection of race and gender. For example, Gale Richards, Leoner Gardner-Howard, and Carol Moore co-convened the BME (Black and minority ethnic) Women's Ministers Network between 2014 and 2019, which sought to be a safe space and place of support for the around twenty-five Baptist women ministers of colour.⁷⁹

In 2018, Hudson-Roberts reflected that the application of the journey process had been 'painfully slow'.⁸⁰ The apology was, and is, a definite marker in English Baptist history, but a racially just Union remains elusive. Due to the public outcry after the death of George Floyd in May 2020 in the United States of America, racial justice has been back on the agenda.⁸¹ Within the churches, the cry to be heard by people of colour has found new strength⁸² and there is the possibility

⁷⁵ Gale Richards, *Text and Story* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2014); BUGB, *Pentecost People* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2017); *Lest We Forget* (2018); and the book *Journeying to Justice: Contributions to the Baptist Tradition across the Black Atlantic*, ed. by Anthony Reddie et al. (Paternoster, 2017).

⁷⁶ Lecturers have included Robert Beckford, Neville Callum, Joel Edwards, Bev Thomas, and Rose Hudson-Wilkin. This has been part of a wider project, see *The Sam Sharpe Project* <<http://www.samsharpeproject.org/>> [accessed 22 February 2022].

⁷⁷ Kingsley Appiagyei (2009); Rupert Lazar (2016); and Yinka Oyekan (2020).

⁷⁸ In 2014, the Union marked 200 years of partnership with the Jamaican Baptists and produced a souvenir booklet.

⁷⁹ See also Michele Mahon, 'Sisters with Voices: A Study of the experiences and challenges faced by Black women in London Baptist Association Church Ministry Settings', *Black Theology: An International Journal*, 13, no. 3 (2015), 273–96.

⁸⁰ Wale Hudson-Roberts, 'Conclusion', in *Lest We Forget* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2018), p. 21.

⁸¹ Responses from the within the Baptist Union can be found at 'George Floyd — I Can't Breathe' <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/345102/George_Floyd_I.aspx> [accessed 17 March 2022].

⁸² See the different contributions to the Baptists Together Racial Justice blog <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/350290/Racial_Justice_Blogs.aspx> [accessed 22 February 2022].

among Baptists of a second *kairos* moment that will take further steps forwards on the journey towards justice. It might be observed that while a number of men have for a long time partnered with women in making the case for gender justice,⁸³ white people have been less vocal in terms of making the case for racial justice.⁸⁴ For example, the *Baptist Ministers' Journal* and the *Baptist Quarterly* have given race no real attention,⁸⁵ and equally there has been no in-depth theological⁸⁶ and historical reflection on race prior to 2007 from the Union or British Baptist theologians.⁸⁷

A More Just Baptist Agenda

This short article is part of a planned larger piece of work that aims to tell the story of how the Baptist Union of Great Britain has changed and is changing. Both women and people of colour have found some positive change, but this has not been without struggle, and understandable frustration and anger remains.⁸⁸ This reflects what Willie

⁸³ For example, Simon Woodman, 'A Biblical Basis for Affirming Women in Ministry', *Baptist Ministers' Journal*, 296 & 297 (2007), 8–13 and 10–15 respectively.

⁸⁴ Although see the contributions from Steve Latham, 'A White Guy Talks Race', and Richard Kidd, 'An Ongoing Apology', in *Journeying to Justice*, ed. by Anthony Reddie et al., pp. 83–93, and pp. 177–81 respectively.

⁸⁵ In over 300 editions of the *Baptist Ministers' Journal*, and over 1000 articles, I found 16 articles that address questions of race, of which 7 were written by people of colour. In the case of the *Baptist Quarterly*, in its hundred-year history, articles that discuss people of colour number probably no more than 10, and authors of colour number less than 5.

⁸⁶ In one rare *Baptist Times* comment piece on racism, Brian Haymes, then principal of Northern Baptist College, wrote about taking part in racism awareness training and of recognising 'an incipient racism in all of us, and in the structures of our society' ('The racism in All of Us', *Baptist Times*, 6 February 1992, p. 4).

⁸⁷ To take one example, in *New Baptists, New Agenda* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), Nigel Wright begins by saying he hopes '[this book] might become a resource for thinking about the identity and direction of Baptist churches throughout the first decade of this century' (p. ix); there is no mention of race or racial justice. It has not been on the agenda of white scholars. See also Julian Gotobed, 'A Challenge to Change: British Baptists and Racism (1990–1999)', unpublished paper given at Hearts and Minds Conference (South Wales Baptist College, 2018), and Julian Gotobed, 'Diseased Imaginations and Desire: Ecclesial and Racist Convictions in Baptists', unpublished paper given at Theology Live Conference (London, 2019).

⁸⁸ The letters pages of the *Baptist Times* in the period under review demonstrated a fairly regular debate over the validity of women in ministry and how to respond to racism, often unifying in tone.

James Jennings has called Christianity's 'diseased social imagination'.⁸⁹ A Baptist identity that embodies justice has a long way to go.

I want as a way of conclusion to turn to a small essay written twenty years ago by Richard Kidd.⁹⁰ In this essay Kidd argued that the concerns and practice of early Baptist theology and those of theologies of liberation have some similarities, and he suggests that this should still be true today.⁹¹ 'Theologies of liberation', he says, 'are concerned with transformation', often of institutional structures, and therefore 'Baptists should find something of a natural home in liberation circles'.⁹² He finds overlap between Baptists and liberation theology around the themes of Scripture, community, mission, discipleship, and conversion.

In his conclusion, Kidd puts forward a tentative Baptist agenda around what he sees as five parameters. The first parameter is what he terms a 'proper measure of tentativeness associated with beliefs'.⁹³ It is not that we do not know, but it is that we cannot possibly know all. Second comes a humility that 'majors on listening rather than speaking'⁹⁴ and particularly on listening to those without power and privilege. This is about an openness to act not as teacher, but as one needing to be taught. Third, a liberating Baptist agenda requires 'attention to matters of power'.⁹⁵ Power is everywhere present, and therefore it requires that we recognise how it is used and for what purposes. Fourth is the importance of staying — of staying in the struggle, of staying in the

⁸⁹ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale, 2010), p. 6. From a UK perspective, see Anthony G. Reddie, *Theologising Brexit* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

⁹⁰ Richard Kidd was principal of Northern Baptist College, Manchester, 1994–2013.

⁹¹ Richard Kidd, 'Baptists and Theologies of Liberation', in *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way*, ed. by Paul S. Fiddes, Brian Haymes, Richard L. Kidd, and Michael Quicke (Oxford: Whitley, 2000), pp. 39–52.

⁹² Kidd, 'Baptists', p. 46.

⁹³ Kidd, 'Baptists', p. 51. The implications of this have been explored by Sean Winter, *More Light and Truth?* (Oxford: Whitley, 2007); Helen J. Dare, *Always on the Way and in the Fray* (Oxford: Whitley, 2014); and more recently Helen Dare, 'Remembering our Hermeneutics: Baptists Reconciling (with) Interpretative Diversity', in *Reconciling Rites*, ed. by Andy Goodliff et al., pp. 48–70.

⁹⁴ Kidd, 'Baptists', p. 51. On listening, see also Ryan Andrew Newson, *Inhabiting the World: Identity, Politics and Theology in a Radical Baptist Perspective* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2018), pp. 21–25.

⁹⁵ Kidd, 'Baptists', p. 51. For one helpful study of power by a Baptist, see Roy Kearsley, *Church, Community and Power* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

institution — with what Kidd calls a ‘proper sense of dissent, a non-conformism, which always keeps us living near an edge’.⁹⁶ The final parameter, Kidd states, is the necessity to work in the context we have inherited and to use any such power that we have to ‘strive to enable that peculiar community of equals, which we find uniquely modelled in the example of Jesus’.⁹⁷ I am not aware of anyone taking up Kidd’s agenda. It stands as a minority report. It offers, though, the possibility of one way of pursuing a more just Baptist identity. An identity that makes space for the experiences, confessions, and stories⁹⁸ of women, and of people of colour, and also for those of people with a disability, people who are LGBT, and people who are not yet adults, all of which might lead Baptists to live an ‘ongoing apology’⁹⁹ and hopefully to realise what it is to be a gospel people together committed to being prophetic, inclusive, sacrificial, missionary, and worshipping communities.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Kidd, ‘Baptists’, p. 52. This finds echoes with Gouldbourne, *Reinventing the Wheel*, pp. 44–45.

⁹⁷ Kidd, ‘Baptists’, p. 52.

⁹⁸ On the phrasing of experiences, confessions, and stories see Paul Fiddes, ‘Theology and a Baptist Way of Community’, in *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way*, ed. by Paul Fiddes et al., pp. 19–27.

⁹⁹ Kidd, ‘Ongoing Apology’, in *Journeying to Justice*, ed. by Anthony Reddie et al., pp. 177–81.

¹⁰⁰ This is a reference to the Baptist Union publication *5 Core Values for a Gospel People* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1999). See Andy Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020), pp. 14–15, 132–134.

